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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2626
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2005
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000907

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ NGO FORUM FOCUSES ON INTERNAL, GOVERNMENT
COOPERATION

REF: BISHKEK 724

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Classified By: CDA Lee Litzenberger, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Over 150 Kyrgyz NGOs from throughout the country convened July 10-11 to discuss constitutional, economic, ecological, and social reform; corruption; the future of political party development; and the role of civil society in relation to the Kyrgyz Government's Country Development Strategy for 2007-2010. Supported by the Embassy's Democracy Commission funds, as well as the Soros Foundation and OSCE, the forum provided a necessary outlet for the NGO community to make its efforts known to the government and society as a whole. The second national forum since the March 2005 "Tulip Revolution," the meeting included sometimes heated debates regarding relations with the government and the manner in which political parties should be included in future elections. Forum participants reached consensus on most issues and vowed to work together and with the government throughout the reform process. End Summary.

STRONG NGOs = A STRONG KYRGYZSTAN

12. (SBU) Organized by a six-member committee of NGO leaders, including civil society activists Raya Kydyrova, Edil Baisalov, and Alisher Mamasaliyev, the July 10-11 National NGO Forum was the second of its kind since the "Tulip Revolution." The national forum followed a series regional NGO meetings earlier in the year. With an estimated 180 representatives from 150 separate organizations in attendance, the conference focused on specific issues and their relation to the Kyrgyz Government's recently adopted Country Development Strategy (CDS) (Reftel). The forum's organizers limited participation to those who helped develop the GOKG Strategy or could play a role in monitoring its economic, social, political, and ecological benchmarks. In addition to the NGO representatives, the conference was attended by the head of the presidential administration's

human rights commission, Tursunbek Akun, and international donors, including the Soros Foundation, OSCE, and USG.

13. (SBU) NGO speakers, moderated by Foundation for Tolerance International's Raya Kydyrova, appealed to fellow NGO representatives and the donor community to focus their combined attention on the development of civil society and its evolving relations with the government. Doing so, said Kydyrova, would strengthen the decision-making power of civil society and NGOs and, as a result, further strengthen Kyrgyzstan's development. Noting that Kyrgyz NGOs are not products of foreign entities, but rather homegrown associations, forum organizers pressed attendees to concentrate upon domestic issues affecting the future stability of Kyrgyzstan's civil society. To that aim, speakers also urged their colleagues to study the CDS intently, and work cooperatively with the various government agencies that seek to turn the Strategy into reality. They also called for NGO groups to cooperate amongst themselves as well, adding that differences of opinion are welcomed as an illustration of pluralism at work.

NGO, GOVERNMENT STRATEGY: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

14. (SBU) Most of the forum participants agreed that the CDS should be used as a basis for NGO activities for the next three years. A number of attendees, however, pointed to the CDS's lack of substance on the development of political parties and energy policy, noting that the government needs to do more to inform society on issues of national importance. Some participants also accused the government -- in particular, the National Security Service (GKNB), Prosecutor General's Office, and Presidential Administration -- of attacking, rather than informing, civil society.

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15. (SBU) In response, presidential administration representative Azamat Dekambayev welcomed the inclusion of civil society as an equal partner in implementation of the CDS. He said the goals of the CDS are to improve the country's overall democratic development, starting with social-political stability; address the national debt; improve the financial sector; and promote fiscal reform. Dekambayev also pointed to other areas to be improved, including Kyrgyzstan's economic potential, anti-corruption efforts, social development, and environmental protection, that could not be addressed without the support of NGOs, civil society, and the international donor community. Dekambayev said at least \$4.2 billion would be required to realize the Strategy's three-year objectives, with about \$500 million coming from international donors.

NGO ACTIVITY IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

16. (SBU) NGO leaders Edil Baisalov and Alisher Mamasaliyev addressed the issue of NGO involvement in politics. Noting that civil society should not be held separate from political activities, Baisalov said that it was within citizens' rights to voice their opinions regarding the future of the country. He added that holding public demonstrations also a civil right that could not be ignored. Mamasaliyev agreed, but said that NGO representatives should first separate themselves from their organizations before participating in politics. Later that day, Baisalov announced that he was leaving his NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, after leading the organization for eight years. He said he would continue his efforts to promote Kyrgyzstan's development.

17. (C) Presidential Administration Human Rights Commission Chairman Tursunbek Akun added that NGOs that receive foreign grants should not participate in domestic politics, as their involvement could be viewed as interference in internal

affairs -- damaging the image of the NGO community as a result. Akun separately told Poloff that he views the work of local NGOs to be exemplary, however, and he attended the forum to show his support. He noted that their level of political involvement could not be repeated elsewhere in Central Asia. (NOTE: In a later press interview, Akun accused NGO Adilet Legal Clinic of spending \$400,000 of its own funds to finance the April 2007 anti-government demonstration. Adilet director Cholpon Jakupova told Poloff that Akun wanted to tarnish her image, since they both were rumored to be in line to be the next Ombudsman for Human Rights. Although not interested in the position, Jakupova was distressed by the accusation. END NOTE.)

NGO ACTION PLAN: A WORK IN PROGRESS

18. (SBU) Following an afternoon of discussion among the working groups, the forum participants presented their Action Plan, or "Platform," for 2007-2010 on July 11, but not without a few final arguments. Formulated in accord with the CDS, the Platform outlined initiatives for the NGO community to implement cooperatively over the next three years. While most of the points presented were met with unanimous consent, there was debate over how best to register candidates standing for election. In the end, they decided to form a committee to look at the positives and negatives of registration fees and collecting signatures.

19. (SBU) On other points, the forum participants agreed to send a letter to President Bakiyev, denouncing the nomination of ex-Prosecutor General Kambarlay Kongantiyev to chair the Central Election Commission. They also proposed a number of human rights activists -- including Interbilim's Asiya Sasykbayeva and Citizens Against Corruption's Tolekan

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Ismailova -- for the position of Ombudsman for Human Rights. The post is expected to be vacated by the current Ombudsman, Tursunbay Bakir uulu, when his term ends this December. The forum's final resolution also called for the parliament to pass the draft constitution prepared by PM Almaz Atambayev's working group, despite its unspecified imperfections.

COMMENT

10. (SBU) Above all else, the forum illustrated that, despite worries of a fractured civil society, the NGO community seems capable of working together towards common objectives. For now, that unified aim appears to be the community's desire to see civil society included in the government's plan for Kyrgyzstan's development, and to ensure that Kyrgyz society as a whole remains informed and engaged.

LITZENBERGER